

Arthur James Farnworth MBE, PhD

30 September 1923 – 10 December 2006

It was with great regret that we heard the news of Arthur's death. Arthur was President from 1990-1993, and was one of the most dedicated and influential presidents that the Club has had. He came to – was thrust into – the position at a time when the Club was at a very low ebb. Membership had been falling for several years, *The Victorian Naturalist* seemed to be on the verge of foundering, and our tenure at the Herbarium was becoming increasingly insecure. Initially somewhat daunted by the position he found himself in, Arthur tackled these problems with energy and determination.

Arthur Farnworth was elected to the Club in 1986, with the intention of quietly pursuing his interests in natural history and honing his skills in nature photography. He and his wife Enid, who ably supported him throughout his presidency, attended Botany Group meetings, where he fell under the talent-spotting eye of Marie Allender. In the lead-up to the 1990 AGM, Marie suggested to me that Arthur would be a good person to have on Council. I contacted him, and he agreed to stand. My approach might have been a little disingenuous, because I knew that I would not be standing for re-election as Vice-President, as I was going overseas later in the year, and the hunt was already on to find another candidate. On a Botany Group excursion, Marie and I put the suggestion to Arthur that he should stand for this position. (In those days we had only one Vice-President.) In May 1990 he was duly elected. But we had no President, and in August the person who had subsequently been appointed, resigned. Arthur, totally unexpectedly and with some dismay, found himself in the position.

Two major problems immediately confronted him: the lateness of *The Victorian Naturalist*, and the confusion of the membership records. The failure to get *The Victorian Naturalist* out on time, so that members had notice of meetings and



excursions before they occurred, had existed for some time, and Council had regularly discussed the feasibility of having a newsletter. Nothing had come of this because no-one seemed willing to undertake the task of producing one. In October 1990 Arthur sent an open letter to all members announcing that a newsletter would be included with the bi-monthly *The Victorian Naturalist*, and that measures were being undertaken to ensure that the journal appeared on time. The Field Naturalists Club of Victoria Newsletter January/February 1991 duly appeared, under the able editorship of Dr Noel Schleiger. From the outset it became a stand-alone publication, but remained bi-monthly until August 1994, when, under the title *Field Nats News*, it became monthly. It has appeared regularly from the outset, without a break, since then, and nowadays there is an efficient system in place that ensures its production and mailing. *The Victorian Naturalist* also began to be published more on schedule. In the early days there was much burning of the midnight oil to achieve this, in which Arthur played a major role. He was fortunate that he gathered around him a willing band of helpers, but he inspired people, and they responded to this. He was quick to express

his appreciation of anyone's efforts, with the quotation 'I dips me lid', which he used whenever he thought it merited.

In January 1991 an editorial sub-committee was set up to assist the editors in the planning and costing of *The Victorian Naturalist* and the *Newsletter*. The Club had been late in submitting its application for the Treasury grant, which it had previously received. Arthur rectified this by writing to the Premier, and the grant of \$1500 was restored.

The Club's membership records had been computerised in 1985, but the system was outsourced, and there were many pitfalls; the situation was aggravated in 1990 by the lackadaisical attitude of the current Subscription Secretary. This was another problem that Arthur had to tackle, and again willing helpers, such as Margaret Potter, came to his assistance. It took more than two years to sort out the confusion, but the provision of office space in the Astronomer's Residence, as a result of negotiations with the Herbarium, made the administration of the Club easier, and in 1993 the membership records were installed on our own computer.

Amongst other matters needing attention was the future of the Club's Kinglake property. Council had always understood that by the terms of Harold Frahm's will the Club was unable to dispose of the block. However, diminishing use of it by the Club, together with an increasing vandalism, and resulting expense, made it important that some action be taken. Arthur initiated investigation of the Club's position, and it was established that it was under no legal obligation to retain the property. The money from the sale of the Kinglake block, though long delayed, became an important contribution in the establishment of the Club in its present home and so we may thank Arthur for the part he played in this.

Arthur was a superb nature photographer, and his slide shows were always informative. But it was not unknown for him to conclude with a very striking photograph

and the cheerful remark 'And I don't know what the hell this is!' He had a great sense of humour. His 1992 presidential address, entitled 'Kakadu and other interests', included slides which had tickled his fancy. His informative article in *The Victorian Naturalist* on the changes in Mallacoota Inlet was typical, full of comic asides and concluding with the comment that 'the jetties lying several centimetres below the surface of the lake, provided a golden opportunity for anyone with delusions of grandeur to practise walking on water,' adding that there were rumours that several MPs had occasionally been seen at Mallacoota Inlet!

Arthur Farnworth was born in Geelong on 30 September 1923, and was educated at the Gordon Institute of Technology, and the Universities of Melbourne and Leeds. After several years as Senior Lecturer in Textile Chemistry at the Gordon Institute, he became a Research Officer with CSIRO, where he developed Si-Ro-Set, the permanent press process, which smartened us all up. In 1961 he became Technical Director of the Australian Wool Board, Deputy Managing Director in 1970, and General Manager, Corporate Services and Research Division, Australian Wool Corporation in 1974. In 1946 he married Enid Brown, by whom he had three children.

In recent years Arthur's membership of the Club lapsed, as Enid's debilitating illness required increasing care, but he left a lasting legacy, primarily by the establishment of *Field Nat News*, but also in revitalising the Club at a time of crisis. We have good reason to be grateful. Our condolences go to his family.

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